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AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION: PERIODICAL LITERATURE ¹

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Popular periodicals have become an important factor in education. They reach thousands of people. Several have a circulation of more than 100,000, and a few claim to reach a million readers. Every subject of popular interest is exploited. This popular interest determines in a large measure the choice of subject-matter, but not always. Interest in new things is often stimulated by well-written articles. Indeed there is a keen search for new things or the beginnings of new movements that may seem to have elements of popular interest. The importance of rural education, the inefficiency of the present system, and the need of redirecting rural education are new things from the standpoint of the popular periodical.

An educational system which originated in pioneer days, and which served its purpose well in those days, persists today with less modification than has taken place in any other feature of rural life. The few changes that have taken place were brought about largely through imitation, either voluntarily or impressed by law, of urban schools, and were not the changes of an adaptive growth. This static condition of rural education until a few years ago, and in most communities at the present time, was looked upon with complacency and satisfaction. Patrons who were not satisfied quietly moved to some town or city where their children might have better educational advantages, but little or no criticism of the rural school was ventured and little or no effort made to improve it.

With this situation in mind, it is easy to see why any departure from the established routine in rural-school manage-

¹ A discussion of "Agricultural Education in Educational Periodicals" appeared as the preceding article of this series, in this magazine, September, 1910.

ment or any effort to make its work better adapted to rural conditions would be regarded by editors of popular periodicals as something new and worthy of wide publicity.

Consolidation of rural schools began in the early nineties. Various periodicals gave accounts of the schools of Kingsville Township, Ohio, which in 1892 instituted a plan of consolidation for rural schools. This movement soon attracted much attention, and many visits were made to Ohio for the purpose of seeing the plan in actual operation. In a few years the plan was not only extended to other parts of Ohio but was introduced in many other states. It has worked so successfully as to be considered one of the most important features of any general scheme for improving rural schools.

The work of Kingsville Township was not the historical beginning of the consolidated-school movement, but it was the potential beginning, largely due to the public notice it received through newspapers and periodicals.

Superintendent O. J. Kern, of Winnebago County, Ill., had barely demonstrated the success of his Farmer Boys' Experiment Club which he had organized in February, 1902, among the schoolboys of his county, when he was asked to give an account of it in one of our leading popular magazines. This work of his was something new in a county system of schools, and furthermore it had begun at once to interest farmers and to change their attitude toward the rural schools. Winnebago County was a typical county with large agricultural interests. Its problems and interests were like those of hundreds of other counties. Superintendent Kern had found something that looked toward making the school life of the country boys more worth while, but he had much more in mind than his Boys' Experiment Club. He believed that the whole rural-school system needed readjustment and that it might be slowly brought about.

Here was a chance for the magazine to be of service by giving publicity to successful work, and for the writer to get others interested in his plans, and to get them to work along similar lines. The article appeared under the title of "Learning by Doing for the Farmer Boy" and was illustrated by five

good pictures with the "boy" prominently in the foreground of each. The title and the pictures were attractive and were likely to cause the reader to pause in turning through the pages of the magazine long enough at least to read the introductory paragraph. This was an expression of an ideal for rural education which up to that time (1903) had not come much into public notice:

It is not the belief or wish of the writer that we should educate country boys to be farmers merely, any more than that we should educate boys to be blacksmiths, carpenters, or electricians. We should aim to train boys to be men in the highest sense of the term. But why not a course of training in the country school for the country boy which shall teach him more about country life around him? Along with his study of the kangaroo, the bamboo, and the cockatoo, why not study the animals on the farm and a proper feeding-standard for them, the care and composition of the soil on the farm, the improvement of types of grains and vegetables, and the protection of birds beneficial to the farmer? Instead of all the boys' arithmetic being devoted to problems, more or less theoretical, on banking, stocks, exchange, brokerage, alligation, and partnership, why not some practical problems with reference to farm economics? For the boys who will remain on the farm (and 85 per cent perhaps will) the course of instruction should be such as will be an inspiration and a help in their future life-work (84).^a

A year later under the title of "Common-Sense Country Schools" a description of Mr. Kern's work appeared in another magazine (85). Other references to his work have been published from time to time.

Boys' clubs for carrying on agricultural experiments have been organized in all of the agricultural states. Accounts of their work are attractive reading, and no doubt not only stimulate the boys in other localities to form similar clubs but help to educate adult farmers to be more appreciative of expert opinion. But the most important contribution made by periodicals to agricultural education through boys' clubs has been in making the way easier for agricultural colleges and public-school officers to carry on the work in various parts of the country.

In the same number of the magazine in which Mr. Kern's article appeared is another dealing with the problem of rural

^aThe references are to the bibliography at the end of this article or to bibliographies in other articles of this series.

education (86). The need of a school system adapted to rural conditions is set forth. Special emphasis is placed upon the value of agricultural high schools and of consolidated rural schools. At that time there were twelve agricultural high schools in the United States. There are now seventy-five.

Another account of important work in agricultural education was published in the same year (1903) with the title "Teaching Farmers' Children on the Ground" (87). It is of interest to compare the opinion of Superintendent Kern as to the needs of the rural school with that of the writer of this article who was not professionally engaged in education. The following is taken from his description of a rural school:

But there is more the matter with the ordinary country school than its smallness of scale. . . . Yet that these children come from homes where the livelihood is earned out of the ground is ignored in the lessons. The instruction as far as it goes is good: it is staple reading, writing, and arithmetic, with a little grammar, geography, and history. This is all. It might do well enough if the boys and girls were all going to be clerks or traders; or if, in the fulness of their ambition, they were to strike out for professional careers. But of sowing and reaping there is never a word; nothing about planting and tending of trees, the production of milk, butter, and cheese. Never, even remotely, does a lesson touch on building and drainage, on the composition of foods or chemistry of fuel, or light up for so much as a moment the drama of struggle and survival of which every clover patch is a theater. It is well that children should learn at school useful lessons they can learn nowhere else, but should not the children of the farm be led to see somewhat of the inexhaustible scope for brains which offers itself to the farmer? The fact is, that rural instruction has been largely devised in cities with a view to city conditions. And the courses in city schools are faulty enough, ridden as they are by clerky traditions which permit the word to usurp the place of the act, instead of being merely its symbol and aid. The second evil in rural education throughout America is the stress laid upon verbal studies, the blinking the actual world of duty and joy for which country children should be informed and trained.

This is followed by a description of the proposed scheme for the improvement of rural education in Canada planned on a scale to include the whole Dominion. Not only is this description accurate but it includes a good historical and economic background. This account of the "Macdonald Movement"

before it was carried out in actual practice prepared the public mind for the numerous reports of the work that have appeared since.

Mention should be made of one more popular article on rural education appearing in 1903, entitled "Farmer Children Need Farmer Studies" (88). The title indicates the general nature of the discussion. That the writer is in full accord with the views already noted of other contributors is shown by the following statements:

Our educational system has been made for city people, and the country school finds it second hand and ill-fitting and unattractive. To this fact more than any other, perhaps, is due the backwardness of education in agricultural states.

Quoted from a private letter:

Statistics show that in this state each year sixty young men take up ministry, sixty-six law, and seventy-two medicine, while 13,000 annually take up agriculture as a gainful pursuit. But our school books are written for the few not the many. . . . At present the entire curriculum leads away from the farm. . . . Pick up any high-grade arithmetic in use in the rural schools and you will find no lack of attention to banking and commissions and foreign exchange and commercial affairs generally. But agriculture arises to no such dignity—not even in schools that will find five times as many recruits for the farm as for the city. The same applies to other texts.

The typical examples above presented of popular periodical literature on rural education appeared in 1903. This year was chosen because it seemed to mark the beginning of a somewhat general public interest in the subject, and partly because most of the development of agricultural education in elementary and secondary schools has taken place since that time.

During the period from 1904 to the present the subject of rural education has continued to receive notice in popular periodicals (85, 89, 90, 91, 92). The public has been kept informed concerning various phases of its development, agricultural and other industrial work in schools receiving especial attention.

One magazine addressed the following question to a number of prominent educators: "What new subject or new method or new direction of effort or new tendency in educational work

is of most value and significance and now needs most emphasis and encouragement?" (93). Nineteen replies were received. As most of the writers were college presidents various college problems were mentioned as of greatest importance but no two proposed the same problem. The only subject that was mentioned by more than three was practical education, summed up as follows: Trade work in public schools; interest in rural schools; practical studies; agriculture for rural schools; reaching all the people; teaching every man his job.

A good account of the present status of agricultural education in elementary and secondary schools appeared under the title "Catching Them Young" (94). After describing some recent progress in farming methods the author adds:

Of what value is this knowledge if the sons and daughters are to quit the farm, leaving corn-belt prosperity to the haphazard agriculture of the city-born and of transplanting foreigners who find conditions and climate vastly different from those of the fatherland? Therefore the corn-belt has at last set itself to raising that greater and more valuable crop of farm boys and farm girls who find material comforts and ample financial recompense on the farm. The greatest factor in the raising of this new crop is education. . . . But the farm boys and girls in order to be interested must be caught young. Before they are old enough to enter the land-grant colleges the lure of the city has entered their minds and the mischief is done. Raising bumper crops of corn and oats, the typically agricultural states of America have heretofore failed to raise satisfactory crops of stay-at-home boys and girls.

An editorial in another magazine revives the criticism which appeared against rural schools a few years before. It is entitled "The Martian and the Farm" (95) and makes the remarks of the supposed Martian who is represented as visiting an ordinary country school the basis of some pointed comments on the rural schools:

I notice that these Americans seem to think the raising of crops to be quite unnecessary; and that they are applying their remarkable intelligence to the task of depopulating their rural regions. They have acuteness to see that if they are to drive people out of the country, they cannot begin with the adult population. Life in the open country is so alluring and so natural that even when it has not been made as complete as it might be, it holds people fast. So these far-reaching Americans, in order to crowd people back

into the cities, where they obviously want them to be, have devised a campaign of education directed toward the children. They have planned all their rural schools on city models. Even in such details as arithmetic problems, they see to it that the children's minds should be directed toward urban life. . . . If this visitor were told what he interpreted as an astute campaign was a mere matter of stupidity and tradition, and that the American People were really wondering how they could check the congestion of cities, he would be forced, out of decent respect for the people he was visiting, to be incredulous.

How can a child born and reared in the country respect the life of the farmer when the community in which he lives does not regard the farmer's occupation worthy of study? How can he be expected to look with ambition toward agriculture as a vocation when he finds that training for it is regarded as less important than preparation for a clerkship? How can he think of village and rural life as anything more than a makeshift when he finds that in the schools he attends there is not a word taught concerning crops or cattle or roads?

The situation in this country is then contrasted with the national policy of rural education recently inaugurated in Canada and the importance of a similar movement in this country suggested. The criticism of the condition in rural schools as to their indifference to rural life does not go unchallenged. In a later number of the same magazine appears a reply in which the editor is brought to task for making implications that were not warranted by the facts in the case. The work in agricultural education of the Middle West is cited as a refutation. The writer in a five months' visit in Canada had been unable to see any reason for holding up the Canadian scheme for rural education as a model for this country (96).

Another letter of reply is published from a farmer who could see no more reason why "a country child should be taught how to run a farm than a city child should be taught how to run a bank."

It seems plain to me [he says] that the public schools are intended to give the young a practical education to prepare them for life, not to prepare them for any particular work in life. . . . Why tax the community in general to instruct its children for work and life on the farm, when many of the patrons and many of the children themselves would prefer general education? (97).

The above editorial and its sequel, the two letters of reply, give some insight into the present situation. No doubt the condition referred to in the editorial does not apply to all rural schools but in general it is not much overdrawn. The writer of the first letter unduly magnifies the work of agricultural education in this country, for it has not had time to modify the ordinary rural schools to any considerable extent, even in the favored Middle West. On the other hand, his five months' visit in Canada failed to show him that the efforts of the Canadian educators are aimed directly at the rural schools. The second letter reveals an attitude which is familiar to those who have undertaken to hold up the chief interest of a rural community as a motive for better schools.

In reviewing the relation of popular periodicals to agricultural education only typical examples have been given. No attempt has been made to have the references complete. Sufficient citations have been given to indicate the character and scope of the discussions of the subject as they have appeared in these periodicals, and to show the service rendered by keeping the subject before the public, and by helping to secure a favorable attitude toward the improvement of rural schools.

Brief reference should be made also to periodicals whose circulation is limited to smaller groups of readers. There is a large number published in the interest of farmers. Most of them are local, being chiefly confined in circulation to a single state. Many are of doubtful value and are about as useful to the farmers as gold bricks. Those that are really sincere in their efforts to improve farm life have exerted considerable influence for the betterment of rural schools and for the introduction of agriculture. Special articles as well as letters from subscribers are published. The most important of these are reviewed from time to time in the *Experiment Station Record* of the United States Department of Agriculture (13) and need not be mentioned here except in this general way. On the whole, agricultural periodicals have maintained too conservative an attitude toward agricultural education, both as to colleges and elementary and secondary schools. One cannot avoid the suspicion that this

attitude on the part of some of these publications is not wholly disinterested. Agricultural education would, among other things, most certainly develop more critical readers, and this would soon react upon the circulation or upon the character of the matter published. Again, the fear of offending some of their readers, thus affecting circulation, makes the publishers cautious in giving space to views that might unsettle the faith of the fathers in the little one-room school.

Occasionally a well-written article on agricultural education appears in the more special periodicals. For example in a magazine "devoted to the philosophy of science" we find a discussion of "Agriculture the Basis of Education" (98). The writer regards the two primal contacts of the child, with nature and with parents, as more fundamental than all questions of subject-matter and methods of formal education. "The mental conditions of agriculture are just as essential to normal development of the human mind as air, food, and exercise for the development of the human body." He refers to the education of the early Greeks in support of his views: "The young Greek of the Homeric age appears to have had much more intimate and adequate contacts with nature and with his elders than our modern education provides, or even permits."

A similar conclusion as to the educational influence of agriculture, though discussed from an entirely different standpoint, is found in an article on "Farm Life as a Basis of Practical Education" (99). The subject for another discussion is the "Need for Agricultural Education" (100). The economic importance of this kind of education is urged. Another point of view is set forth under the title "Rural Education" (101).

Rural education is but a section of the general school question; agricultural education is a branch of technical training. These two phases of education of the farm population meet at many points, they must work in harmony, and together they form a distinct educational problem.

Three difficulties are mentioned: (1) To secure a modern school equal to the city school; (2) to enrich and expand the curriculum so as to make it a vital and coherent part of rural-community life; (3) to provide adequate high-school facilities in the rural community.

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Only references cited by number in the text are included.

84. "Learning by Doing for the Farmer Boy." O. J. KERN. *Review of Reviews*, XXVIII (1903), 456-61.

A description of the Farmer Boys' Club organized in Winnebago County, Ill., February 22, 1902. It includes method of organization, educational excursions, experimental work of the boys, local meetings of the club, the club and the farmers' institute, future outlook of the club. There is also a short account of the first consolidated school in Illinois.

85. "Common-Sense Country Schools." ADELE MARIE SHAW. *World's Work*, VIII (1904), 4881-94.

An illustrated account of O. J. Kern's work among the rural schools of Winnebago County, Ill. It contains a good account of the Farmer Boys' Club.

86. "The New Education for Farm Children." WILLET M. HAYS. *Review of Reviews*, XXVIII (1903), 449-55.

The article is introduced by a general discussion of the educational situation, concluding that there should be a school system adapted to rural conditions. A scheme is presented for an articulated system of education adapted to rural needs: (1) consolidated rural school; (2) agricultural high school; (3) agricultural college. This is one of the first publications of the author's views on a system of rural education. His present views on this subject have been reviewed at some length in a previous article of this series (15).

87. "Teaching Farmers' Children on the Ground." GEORGE ILES. *World's Work*, VI (1903), 3415-20.

After a general discussion of rural education, its needs and shortcomings, the author gives an account of the program for rural educational reform, known as the Macdonald Consolidated Rural School Movement, which was to take effect in Canada the following September. A large number of interesting facts are given not only concerning this proposed reform but also concerning the agricultural work in general in Canada.

88. "Farmer Children Need Farmer Studies." CLARENCE H. POE. *World's Work*, VI (1903), 3760-62.

Reviewed in text.

89. "Agricultural High Schools" (Editorial). *Independent*, LVIII (1905), 334-36.

90. "Two Clear Aims in Education" (Editorial). *World's Work*, XII (1906), 7706-7.

These aims are (1) training for practical purposes, the machinery of which has been perfected only for the professions; (2) training for culture where public good is put before personal aims.

91. "Agricultural Education in the United States." J. C. MEAD. *Nineteenth Century*, LX (1906), 299-306.

A popular historical account dealing mainly with agricultural colleges.

92. "Agriculture in the Common Schools" (Editorial). *Independent*, LXIII (1907), 1508-9.

Two questions are raised: (1) Are the sciences underlying agriculture to be taught? (2) Where will teachers be found to give adequate instruction along such lines? Both questions are answered, the first by making use of pupils' everyday experiences, the second through training schools for teachers.

93. "New Work in Education." *World's Work*, XVI (1908), 10453-62.

Reviewed in text.

94. "Catching Them Young." F. G. MOORHEAD. *Technical World*, XI (1909), 612-18.

Reviewed in text.

95. "The Martian and the Farm" (Editorial). *Outlook*, XXIX (1909), 433-34

Reviewed in text.

96. "Training for Farm Life." D. H. SMALLEY. *Outlook*, XXIX (1909), 811-12.

A reply to (95).

97. "The Automatic Farm." WM. HALSTEAD. *Outlook*, XXIX (1909), 812-13.

A reply to (95).

98. "Agriculture the Basis of Education." O. F. COOK. *Monist*, XVII (1907), 347-64.

Reviewed in text.

99. "Farm Life as a Basis of Practical Education." *Craftsman*, XVI (1909), 243-45.

Some of the plans of the Craftsman Farms are set forth. Active farm operation is regarded as the first step in creating an ideal school environment. "To use the idea of education seems as big and interesting as the whole of life itself. And the farm work which is necessary to make the land productive for our own maintenance and also to make the ground attractive to the eye seems to us to afford a series of experiments, the educational value of which no scientific laboratory could equal."

100. "Need for Agricultural Education." D. Y. THOMAS. *Annals of the American Academy*, XXXV (1910), 150-55.

The purpose of this paper is to "emphasize the advisability" of extending the work in agricultural education. "Education must be democratized and made to subserve the economic interest of man. This will not kill the cultural school but foster it. The man who wants to be a lawyer or a doctor or a teacher or a journalist will have a hundred opportunities where he now has one."

101. "Social Problems of American Farmers: Rural Education." KENYON L. BUTTERFIELD. *American Journal of Sociology*, X (1905), 615-19.

Reviewed in text.